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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
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INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2387
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 9409
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7664
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5438
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3825
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 0024
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0224
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0848
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4487
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9969
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 7216
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0219
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0106
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT SPEAKS OF UNITY, EMERGENCY REGULATIONS
UP FOR RENEWAL

Classified By: AMBASSADOR PATRICIA A. BUTENIS. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

PRESIDENT'S NATIONAL DAY MESSAGE

11. (C) In his Sri Lankan National Day speech in Kandy on February 4, President Rajapaksa promised to turn Sri Lanka into the "Pride of Asia" through economic development and national unity. The themes were quite similar to those used in his op-ed article in the February 4 edition of the Wall Street Journal. As in most recent major speeches by the president, a portion was given in Tamil, and this portion appears to be growing slowly with each speech, perhaps as he grows more comfortable with his Tamil pronunciation. There were no major new initiatives announced, and the speech was in general very non-specific.

12. (C) When speaking of Sri Lanka's foreign policy, Rajapaksa stated that Sri Lanka was "independent and non-aligned." State television commentators said after the speech that the golden era of Sri Lankan foreign relations would now put it alongside Asian, Middle Eastern, and Latin American countries that had opposed "U.S. imperialism" and that Sri Lanka would not allow western powers to divide the country as they "divided the former Soviet Union." Interestingly, there appear to have been changes in some of the text of the president's speech when the official English translation was released on the government's website. Post is looking into this to see what portions were changed and to what extent.

13. (SBU) The Ambassador attended the National Day events in Kandy and visited the embassy's booth in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' tent at the National Development Exhibition.

LOCAL REACTION

14. (C) Some local observers stated that far fewer Sri Lankan flags were flown by residents on National Day this year, with

several saying this was representative of a lack of confidence by the public in the government following the controversial election results. (NOTE: This was also the first National Day after the conclusion of the war, and it is possible that overt expressions of patriotism may have declined due to the end of hostilities. END NOTE.) On February 3, the UNP and JVP went forward with their protest of the election results, despite police warnings that the protest meeting was not authorized. While precise estimates of protest attendance are usually not available in Sri Lanka, a number of observers familiar with the protest location estimated between 5,000 and 10,000 persons were in attendance.

EMERGENCY RULE VOTE

15. (C) Parliament was expected to vote late on February 5 on the extension of the state of emergency. The UNP and JVP abstained from recent votes (the emergency regulations must be renewed monthly), but opposition leaders told us this week that they would all vote against the measure this time. Ravi Karunanayake, Secretary for International Affairs for the UNP and a Member of Parliament, admitted to PolCouns that the president still likely would have enough votes to pass the measure, but this would appear to represent the first major push against the state of emergency since the end of the war. BUTENIS